



NEWS RELEASE
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**STATEMENT OF UNITED STATES ATTORNEY JOHN L. BROWNLEE ON
THE INDICTMENTS OF TIMOTHY FENNON SAMPSON, JERRY RILEY
MILLS, AND TONY LEE EPPERSON**

In the early morning hours of August 15, 2002, Michael Wayne Short and Mary Hall Short were murdered in their home at the northern end of Henry County, Virginia. They were both shot in the head where they slept. When the deputies from Sheriff Cassell's Office arrived on the scene, Jennifer Renee Short, Michael and Mary's nine-year-old daughter, was missing from her room, from the house, and from the surrounding area. Despite a careful and thorough search, Jennifer was not found.

On September 25, 2002, the limited remains of what appeared to be a child were found near Grogan Road in Rockingham County, North Carolina, which is in the northern part of the State, directly below Henry County. The most significant remains of the child were found in an unnamed creek. They were in the creek on the down-river side of a small bridge that allows passage over the river. The forensic laboratory in Roanoke confirmed on October 3, 2002, that these skeletal remains matched Mary Short's DNA profile, which means that we had found Jennifer.

Since that morning of August 15, a task force of federal, state and local law enforcement officers have been investigating this case for a federal Grand Jury sitting in Charlottesville, Virginia. The task force investigating this triple-homicide has followed, and continues to investigate, quite literally, thousands of leads. A number of people have been very helpful in our quest to understand what happened to this family. Unfortunately, a small group of people have made this task more difficult. The two indictments that I have asked to be unsealed today charge three people with lying to the task force investigating these murders.

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With one of these indictments, the Grand Jury sitting in Charlottesville, Virginia, has charged [Timothy Fennon Sampson and Jerry Riley Mills](#) with perjury and providing material and false information to the task force. Mr. Sampson is also charged with threatening to kill two law enforcement officers in order to obstruct the administration of justice and with causing another witness to commit perjury before the Grand Jury. There are eight separate counts in this indictment. The maximum penalty for all of these counts, with the exception of the two obstruction counts, is a potential penalty of up to five years. Each obstruction count subjects Mr. Sampson to a maximum penalty of ten years.

The other indictment charges [Tony Lee Epperson](#) with providing material and false information to the task force. This charge subjects Mr. Epperson to up to five years in prison.

I find it very difficult to highlight the work and support of the numerous officers and agencies that are essential to this ongoing investigation. This is an ongoing team effort by, quite literally, dozens of law enforcement officers. Two Deputy Sheriffs, Major K.G. Nester, of the Henry County Sheriff's Office, and Captain Bobby Wayne Lawson, of the Rockingham County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office, are a good starting point here. As found by this Grand Jury, both of these officers have had their lives threatened simply because they were doing their job by investigating this case. Kimmy Nester, who was on the front steps of the Short house the very morning that Michael and Mary Short's bodies were discovered and Jennifer was found to be missing, has been, and continues to be, one of the leaders of this investigation. Bobby Lawson is also a critical partner in the investigation. With this indictment the Grand Jury is demonstrating that it takes seriously threats to the law enforcement officers who are conducting this investigation. I want to thank the leadership of Bart McEntire of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Sheriff Frank Cassell of the Henry County Sheriff's Office, and Sheriff Sam Page of the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office. Your commitment of personnel and resources to this investigation has met no bounds.

We continue to investigate what happened to this family in August of 2002. We do so with patience and deliberation. I encourage anyone who has any information whatsoever about this crime to contact the ATF; the Henry County Sheriff's Office; or the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office. With these two indictments, the Grand Jury has found that these three folks have lied to us, but I can assure you that we remain undeterred in ultimately charging the person, or persons, who committed this crime. There is no Justice for a society that will not protect its children, and for a crime such as this; no one will rest until we get it right.

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